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ABSTRACT

This paper presents an overview of three countries, China, Japan, and Korea, in the northeastern Asia region and provides a bibliography of children's literature from the area in the appendix. The document advocates that the global interdependence of societies necessitates an understanding of the cultures with which people must interrelate. Ramirez and Ramirez's (1994) suggestions for selection of classroom literature includes consideration of the following factors: (1) the general accuracy of the story line; (2) lack of stereotypes; (3) use of appropriate language rather than derogatory slang; (4) accurate perspective of the author; and (5) story line and illustrations that are current in fact and interpretation of children's literature. (EH)

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Children's Literature From Northeastern Asia

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Children's Literature from Northeastern Asia

Northeastern Asia consists of the countries of China, Japan and Korea. These countries are rich in tradition, customs, and literature. The current trend in schools in the United States is to focus on the fact that we live in a global interdependent society. It is important that teachers and students become knowledgeable about the various countries that impact on our society, such as the case of China, Japan, and Korea. As educators we must prepare our students to live and work in a diverse global society as we enter the twenty-first century.

Educators must introduce students to various terms as they prepare to teach and learn about other countries. According to Hernandez (1989), the definition of culture is a system of beliefs, standards, and values which is instrumental in guiding a particular group of people's behaviors, feelings, and thoughts. A culture is a dynamic process which helps people make sense of their lives and understand the behaviors of others (Spindler & Spindler, 1990).

The Northeastern Asia area is cultural, political, educational, and geographically different than the United States. Literature written for children is an ideal way to help students gain an understanding of the area and its people. Bishop (1987) states that students will learn through

literature that all people are alike with the same emotions, needs, and desires, but at the same time can understand the differences among cultural groups. The understanding that needs to be developed can be accomplished through multicultural and multiethnic literature. Multicultural literature according to Harris (1992) is literary works that focus on people of color, religious and regional minorities, the disabled, and the aged. Using multicultural literature will help students understand the country and its people. Also, incorporating multiethnic literature into the curriculum will help students understand the culture and needs of people from those countries that have moved to the United States. Harris (1992) states that multiethnic literature deals with people of diverse backgrounds within the United States including African Americans, Native Americans, Hispanic Americans, and Asian Americans.

When selecting literature to be used in the classroom, the teacher should consider: 1) the general accuracy of the story line, 2) lack of stereotypes, 3) use of appropriate language rather than derogatory slang, 4) accurate perspective of the author, and 5) story line and illustrations need to be current in fact and interpretation of children's literature (Ramirez & Ramirez, 1994).

As the teacher introduces Northeastern Asia literature to his/her

students, time should be spend discussing the various aspects of the country that would help students develop a better understanding of the area to be studied. A brief description of each country is included.

China

China is officially called the People's Republic of China. It is the world's third largest country in area, have over 3,6000,000 square miles and the largest country by population containing 1,169, 619, 000 (as of 1992). It has a recorded history that spans some 3,500 years.

The capital city is Beijng. Other major cities are Shanghai, Tianjin, and Guangzhou. The two major rivers are Huang He (The Yellow River) and Chang (The Yangtze River). According to Chinese legend, the Chinese people originated in the Yellow River Valley.

Most people live on the coast of the country, which borders the Pacific Ocean. Sixty percent of the work force is in agriculture. The chief crops are grain, rice, cotton, and tea. Hogs and poultry are the major livestock production. Fishing is a major industry. China is one of the world's largest mineral producing countries with coal, iron, tungsten, tin, mercury, magnetite, salt, aluminum, uranium, gold and zinc. They are also the world's 5th largest oil producer. China manufactures textiles, chemicals, agriculturally related products, processed foods, iron, steel,

and electronic equipment.

China's land surface consists primarily of mountains, plateaus, and basins. Only 12% of the area may be classified as plains (Microsoft Corporation, 1994).

Japan

Japan is the seventh most populous country in the world. The greatest number of Japanese are crowded into the Tokyo region, where the density in some areas are 20,000 people per square mile. The country itself is close in size to California.

Japan is the leader in foreign trade and exports, since the conclusion of World War II. The United States receives most electronics from Japan, as they produce half of the world's supply of memory chips for computers.

Philosophy/religion of the Japanese people permeates every sector of their culture. Shinto is Japan's major religion. Shinto shrines represent the oneness of nature with the Japanese people.

The average Japanese farm consists of only two and a half areas, but it is a highly productive unit. 40% of the land is devoted to rice production, which is the staple of the Japanese diet. 11% of the land in Japan is arable, very little is used for livestock.

Japan's rigorous system of education has been called the best in the

world. The typical school year consists of 240 days. Students meet from 7:00 A. M. to 4:00 P.M., 5 1/2 days a week. 95% of all junior high graduates attend three years of a senior high program. The Japanese literacy rate is 99%.

The nation of Japan is a strong economic force in which the United States deals with on a daily basis. Constant interpersonal relations with both the business district and Japanese immigrates makes it imperative to assimilate to their cultures and beliefs if we are to be a global society (Microsoft Corporation, 1994).

Korea

North Korea is the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK). It's capital is Pyongyang. South Korea is the Republic of Korea (ROK). It's capital is Seoul.

The official language of both counties is Korean. Korea used to use Chinese as it's official court language. South Korea still uses some Chinese characters. Korean mainly resembles Japanese.

The North Korean Government has a constitution that was written in 1972. It gave the political power to the people through the Supreme People's Assembly. The Assembly's legislature is made of 615 members who are elected by a popular vote every four years. There is another side

to North Korea--the realistic version. North Korea is ruled by the Korean Workers' party, a communist party. The Administration Council leads the government. The Council is directed by the Central Peoples' Committee. What's interesting about that committee that it's members are all high-ranking Communist party members.

South Korea has a democratic government that actually practices. It's president is the head of both the state and the government. The president serves a seven year term and is elected by the electoral college. The business of government is carried out by a person selected by the president, known as the prime minister. South Korea has a one house legislature, with 276 members. The legislature, National Assembly's members serve four year terms.

North Korea's national song is "A chi mun bin na ra I gang san" ("Shine Bright, O Dawn, on This Land So Fair"). South Korea's national song is "Aegug-ka" ("National Anthem").

The North Korea's flag was adopted in 1948. It contains a red star in a white circle. The star represents communism. Above and below the star are wide red stripes and narrow blue stripes. South Korea's flag has a red and blue circle on a white background. This symbolizes how the opposites of the universe are balanced. In each of the four corners is a group of

three-line configurations known as trigrams which represent heaven, earth, fire, and water.

Money is both North and South Korea is known as the won.

Metric measurements are used in both North and South Korea. They also use traditional measurements such as the jungbo (one hectare) and the ri (3,927m).

In 1985 North Korea's population was estimated at 20,061,000 and South Korea's was estimated at 41,371,000.

In North Korea the practice of religion is discouraged because it conflicts with the beliefs of communism although the Buddhist League, the Chondoist Society, and the Christian's League are organizations found in North Korea.

In South Korea the freedom of religion is permitted and many people practice a variety of religions. Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, and Christianity are practiced as major religions (McNair, 1986).

Conclusion

The children's literature bibliography has two perspectives: a compilation of authors from the Northeastern Asian countries and authors from other countries who have written books about the region. Northeastern Asian countries represented in children's literature written

in English or translated in this bibliography are China, Japan, and Korea (Appendix A).

In the bibliography China and Japan have a considerable number of titles that would be appropriate for classroom use. Korea on the other hand does not seem to have as many books written or translated that would be available for use with elementary students.

With the trend to introduce students to multicultural literature, it would seem important to use literature from the Northeastern Asian counties. Also, this would be a good way for educators to include the literary works from China, Japan, and Korea which are often not widely represented in anthologies and readers read by children in the United States.

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Appendix A

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